

Arkansas Department of Education

Dr. Tom Kimbrell, commissioner

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EDUCATION COMMISSIONER ACTS TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL OPERATIONS OF THE PULASKI COUNTY SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas Education Commissioner Dr. Tom Kimbrell today exercised his authority under state law to remove the superintendent and dissolve the board of the Pulaski County Special School District.

The action was taken to immediately move toward restoring confidence in the district's stewardship of public funds, which has been the subject of several critical legislative reports.

"The district needs to set the tone from the top," Dr. Kimbrell said. "There needs to be change in the environment at the district and that starts with school leadership. The district has exhibited a lack of basic financial accountability. To create an atmosphere for children to be successful academically, a change in administration had to be made."

The department made its decision regarding the district in consultation with Gov. Mike Beebe who fully supports Dr. Kimbrell in this matter.

Dr. Kimbrell and other key ADE staff arrived at the PCSSD this afternoon to inform the superintendent, Dr. Charles Hopson, of the changes in district leadership. Steps have been taken to secure school records and to ensure district operations will continue uninterrupted.

A series of investigative reports by the Division of Legislative Audit, starting in April 2010, found numerous irregularities, including the failing of the district's leadership and board to follow its own policies.

In June, 2010, the ADE sent a letter to the district identifying Audit's findings as "extremely serious" and noting that the district faced possible placement on fiscal

distress. Since then, the ADE has worked continuously with the district to resolve the problems. But improvement was lacking, which necessitated Dr. Kimbrell's decision.

Former PCSSD Superintendent Bobby Lester has agreed to lead the district during a short period until a permanent district leader is hired. He will answer directly to Dr. Kimbrell.

Lester is well-respected throughout Arkansas education circles and has said he's dedicated to helping restore accountability and confidence in the district. Lester retired from the PCSSD in 1999 after 34 years at the district, including 15 as superintendent.

In addition, Phyllis Stewart, ADE's chief of staff and liaison to the State Board, will assist Lester during the transition. She is a former executive assistant to Lester at the PCSSD.

The State Board placed the PCSSD on fiscal distress in May. Under the Omnibus Quality Education Act of 2003, the education commissioner has authority to exercise a state takeover of districts in fiscal distress that don't adequately correct their problems.